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‘The One for the Many’: Zeng Baosun, Louise Barnes and the Yifang School for Girls at
Changsha, 1893–1927

Jennifer Bond

On 24th June 1913 Louise Hester Barnes resigned her post as headmistress of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) Mary Vaughan High School in Hangzhou. Her resignation followed a dispute with the CMS about extending her furlough to enable her to support the higher education of her Chinese student, Zeng Baosun 曾寶蓀 (1893-1978), the great-granddaughter of Zeng Guofan 曾國藩 (1811–1872), who was studying in London under her care. Barnes explained in her letter to the society: ‘It is with the very deepest regret that after a connection of almost twenty-three years with the beloved Church Missionary Society that I’m obliged to ask the committee to accept my resignation.’¹ She went on to explain her decision in a further letter dated 30th November 1913: ‘I need hardly say I am not taking this serious step without much thought and waiting upon God. If I returned to China soon, it would have meant no college career for Miss Tseng, and that I considered very short sighted policy as I believe the time has come for us to give our very best efforts to the training of the Chinese or any other students, who are willing and capable of being trained.’²

Barnes’ decision to resign was indeed a ‘serious step’ as she had to forego her pension as a result. As it turns out, her faith in Zeng’s potential was justified. She went on to become the first Chinese woman to earn an honours degree from the University of London, founded her own Christian school for girls in Changsha upon her return to China, and became a leading educator and political figure in Republican China. She represented the Republic of China at the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women in Geneva in 1952 and at the Asian

¹ The correspondence of Louise Barnes is held at the Church Missionary Society Archive, Cadbury Special Collections, Birmingham University. CMS/G1/CH2 /O/1913/ 87 – Louise Hester Barnes to Mr. Bardsley, 24 June 1913.

² CMS/G1/CH2 /O/1913/121 – Louise Barnes to CMS Committee, 30 November 1913.

Anti-Communist League in Manila in 1956. Still, Zeng is little known in mainland China compared to her illustrious great-grandfather, Zeng Guofan, who is famed for his role in suppressing the Taiping rebellion (1850–1864).

Zeng's story deserves greater historical scrutiny not because she was the great-granddaughter of a famous Chinese general, but because her story throws light on the ways in which Christianity shaped the life of Chinese women at the turn of the twentieth century. The story of the relationship between Zeng and Barnes reveals the changing power dynamics between foreign missionaries and Chinese Christians in the process of indigenizing the church in China: the roles of teacher and pupil were reversed upon their return to Changsha, with Zeng acting as headmistress of her own school and Barnes a teacher. Although an extraordinary example due to her elite family background, Zeng's life also highlights the important role played by Christian-educated Chinese women in the process of educational exchange between China and the West. Chinese Christian women such as Zeng could use the social networks to which their education gave them access on a local, national and international scale. Through their experiences of multiple educational systems, both Chinese and western, Chinese Christian women were active agents in the transfer of educational knowledge between China and the West in the early twentieth century, adapting, rejecting and assimilating different aspects as they saw fit.

Although much attention has been paid to the role of western missionaries in the process of internationalising Chinese education, the role of Chinese Christian women in the exchange has been understudied. There have been several studies exploring the contribution of returning male Chinese overseas students who pursued degree studies in Japan, the UK and

the USA at the turn of the twentieth century.³ Hu Ying's examination of Ida Khan and Mary Stone has drawn attention to the role played by missionary-educated Chinese women who stepped outside the domestic sphere in the creation of the Chinese New Woman.⁴ However, very little attention has been paid to their role in educational exchange, which has largely been dominated by studies of western missionaries in their efforts to found and run universities in China.⁵ Chinese women have been portrayed as passive recipients of a modernizing western education, 'enlightening' and 'uplifting' them, unbinding their feet and freeing them from arranged marriages. Although there is a proliferation of English-language missionary writings, it is very difficult, due to a lack of sources in mission archives, to know how Chinese women themselves experienced and responded to missionary education. As Kwok Pui-Lan has highlighted, Chinese Christian women's voices were seldom recorded in conference reports or minutes of church meetings.⁶ Better understanding the role of Christian-educated Chinese women in this process of internationalizing Chinese education is vital for a fuller picture of the missionary enterprise in China and putting the role of western missionaries further into perspective.

Thomas Kennedy's translation of Zeng Baosun's memoir has made her story accessible to an English-speaking audience.⁷ Zeng's memoir, originally published in 1970 when Zeng was seventy-seven, is naturally influenced by loss of memory, nostalgia and the contemporary political situation, and therefore must be treated with caution. Zeng herself admits: 'All my

³ Stacy Biler, *Patriots or Traitors: A History of American Educated Chinese Students* (New York, 2009). See also her 'Zeng Baosun: Embracing Chinese Ideals and Christian Education', in Carol Lee Hamin and Stacey Bieler (eds.), *Salt and Light Volume 3: More Lives of Faith that Shaped Modern China* (Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2011), pp. 93-115.

⁴ Hu Ying, 'Naming the First New Woman', *Nan Nu: Men, Women, and Gender in Early and Imperial China*, 3. 2 (2001), pp. 196 - 231.

⁵ Jessie Gregory Lutz, *China and the Christian Colleges: 1850 -1950* (New York, 1971); Daniel H. Bays and Ellen Widmer (eds.), *China's Christian Colleges: Cross Cultural Connections* (Stanford, 2009), Ruth Hayhoe, *China's Universities 1895-1995: A Century of Cultural Conflict* (London, 1996).

⁶ Kwok Pui-Lan, 'Chinese Women and Protestant Christianity at the Turn of the Century', in Daniel H. Bays (ed.), *Christianity in China: From the Eighteenth Century to the Present* (Stanford, 1996). p. 12.

⁷ Thomas Kennedy, *Confucian Feminist: Memoirs of Zeng Baosun 1893-1978* (Philadelphia, 2002).

diaries and records no longer exist. It has only been since I have enjoyed the peace and security of life here on Taiwan that I felt I could begin writing, but I have had to rely entirely on memory. Inevitably, this resulted in many errors and gaps.’⁸ Although Kennedy’s is a very close translation, I also draw upon the Chinese version for biographical and other information concerning her missionary school experience which he left out.⁹

Early education and conversion to Christianity

Zeng Baosun was born in the spring of 1893 into a wealthy family of the scholarly elite from Xiang Xiang 湘鄉, Hunan Province.¹⁰ Her father, Zeng Guangjun 曾廣鈞, the eldest grandson of Zeng Guofan, was successful in the imperial examinations and in 1889 at the age of twenty-three, became the youngest member of the Hanlin academy.¹¹ A friend and supporter of the reformer Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873–1929), her father held progressive ideas on women’s education.¹² He made sure her feet were not bound and did not arrange a marriage for her. He also did not object to Zeng’s conversion to Christianity and allowed her to go abroad to study.¹³

As Susan Mann, Dorothy Ko and Ellen Widmer have shown, although there were many vocational avenues for female education in late imperial China, only the most privileged girls had a chance to receive a formal education.¹⁴ Born into the wealth of the Zeng family, Zeng Baosun studied alongside her brothers and male cousins under tutors employed in the family

⁸ Kennedy, *Confucian Feminist*, p. 157

⁹ Zeng’s Memoir was originally published in 1970 by the Chinese Christian Literature Council in Hong Kong: Zeng Baosun, *Zeng Baosun huiyilu* (Hong Kong, 1970).

¹⁰ Zeng, *Huiyilu*, p. 1.

¹¹ Kennedy, *Confucian Feminist*, p. 4.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 16.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

¹⁴ Susan Mann, ‘The Education of Daughters in the Mid-Ch’ing period,’ in Alexander Woodside and Benjamin A. Elman (eds.), *Education and Society in Late Imperial China, 1600-1900* (London, 1994); Dorothy Ko, ‘Pursuing Talent and Virtue: Education and Women’s culture in seventeenth and eighteenth century China’, *Late Imperial China*, 13.1 (1992); Widmer, Ellen (ed.), *Writing Women in Late Imperial China* (Stanford, 1997).

school at the Zeng Family home ‘Prosperity Hall’ in Changsha. She was an unusually gifted scholar and an avid reader. Influenced by her reform-minded father, her tutors not only taught the Confucian classics, but also history, geography, modern languages and calisthenics.¹⁵ Zeng was thus more than well prepared academically upon entering public education in missionary schools.

Zeng’s varied formal educational experiences challenge us to rethink traditional interpretations, which place missionary education at the forefront of educational modernization in this period.¹⁶ Zeng found the academic standards at missionary schools disappointing compared to her rigorous training at home, and their heavily religious atmosphere restrictive. For example, upon entering the Baptist Eliza Yates Academy 晏摩氏女校 in Shanghai in 1904, Zeng recalled her disappointment in the curriculum. Although she learned to play western musical instruments (particularly the organ) which was a novelty, the other subjects seemed of little use to her. Given her family background, she had little use for domestic education, which was designed to equip lower class girls with the skills needed to make them useful Christian homemakers: ‘I began to learn to do handicrafts, and to make garments, but there was no mathematics, history or geography.’¹⁷

Naturally academic and excelling in Chinese literature, Zeng found the academic environment of Wuben 務本女中, a Chinese-run private school for girls which she attended from 1905, much more amenable. In 1906 she transferred to Hangzhou Provincial Normal School for Women 杭州省立女子師範.¹⁸ Recognising her academic potential, the mathematics teacher Chen Boyuan 陳伯原 recommended that rather than becoming a

¹⁵ Kennedy, *Confucian Feminist*, p. 21.

¹⁶ Cleverley, John, *The Schooling of China: Tradition and Modernity in Chinese Education* (London, 1985). Lutz, *China and the Christian Colleges*, p. 22.

¹⁷ Kennedy, *Confucian Feminist*, p. 23.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

primary school teacher, Zeng would be better placed to continue her studies at the newly opened Mary Vaughan High School 馮氏女校 in Hangzhou, where he was about to take up an appointment in 1909.¹⁹

The Mary Vaughan High school opened on 13 February 1909, named in honour of CMS missionary Mary Vaughan, who had donated two thousand dollars of her own money to build a school for girls in Hangzhou, but had died shortly before it was finished. Her close friend and fellow CMS missionary Miss Louise Barnes, was appointed as the acting principal for the school in 1909 and remained until 1912.²⁰ Louise Barnes was born Louisa Hester Barnes on 14 January 1855, in Dorchester, Dorset.²¹ In her modest family background, Barnes differed from the majority of CMS missionaries in this period who tended, like Mary Vaughan, to come from the middle classes.²² Her father, Peter Fredrick Barnes was a bricklayer by trade.²³ It is difficult to ascertain Barnes' early educational background but by 1881 she was a certified teacher living in Ryde on the Isle of Wight.²⁴ It is likely that her training and experience as a school teacher made her attractive to the CMS at a point when their educational activities were beginning to expand. Given her humble family background, giving up her pension was a momentous decision. With no wealthy relatives to support her retirement, Barnes' decision to resign was indeed a brave step which highlights how much potential she saw in her Chinese pupil.

The Mary Vaughan School was in many ways a new departure for the CMS in Zhejiang province. It was the Society's first girls' school in East China to cater specifically for the upper classes. Barnes announced with great satisfaction that the school has been able to

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

²⁰ Arthur Elwin, *A Short Sketch of the Life of Mary Vaughan of Hangchow* (Oxford, 1909).

²¹ General Register Office. *England and Wales Civil Registration Indexes*. London, England & Wales, Civil Registration Birth Index, 1837-1915/ Q1/1855/B.

²² See Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China* (New York, 1929), p. 409.

²³ The National Archives, London, *Royal Hospital Chelsea, Soldiers Service Documents*, WO 97/ 559.

²⁴ The National Archives, London, *Census Returns of England and Wales, 1881*, RG11/1179/58 p. 13.

attract girls from ‘High Class Families’ in a letter to the Board dated 19 August 1909: ‘Of the twenty-five pupils, eleven are the daughters of Christians; nearly all the remaining fourteen are from official families, three of their boarders are relatives of the Marquis Tseng. And one day scholar is a granddaughter of a late Prime Minister.’²⁵ Indeed, the fact that the Zeng family had signed up three of their daughters was very welcome advertising for the school, and enabled them to attract more upper-class pupils.²⁶

Although the formal provision of women’s education had been sanctioned in 1907 by the Qing Government, when the Mary Vaughan High School opened its doors in 1909, there was no government school in East China which offered higher level middle school training. Prior to this a number of private schools for girls had been set up by Chinese reformers. In Hangzhou, Manchu noblewoman Hui Xing 惠興 established a school for girls, Zhenwen nǚxue, 貞文女學 (later known as Huixing Girls’ School, 惠興女子中學), as early as 1904. However, this school only offered a curriculum up to the junior middle school level.²⁷ Therefore in the first decade of the twentieth century missionary schools were often the only places where elite girls could gain a higher level middle school education. An advanced curriculum, with English language tuition and textbooks, as well as plush new facilities, help to explain why upper-class families such as the Zeng clan may have chosen the Mary Vaughan School. In November 1908 Barnes reported: ‘On Saturday an educationalist lady from Shanghai asked to see over the building. She told me she had been engaged for six years

²⁵ CMS/G1/CH2 /O/1909/175 – Louise Hester Barnes to Mr. Baring-Gould, 19 August 1909.

²⁶ After Zeng enters the school, several more elite families signed their daughters up. On September 13th 1909 Barnes writes: ‘We are hoping to reopen the school tomorrow with a promise of several new scholars. All daughters of Mandarins’. CMS/G1/CH2 /O/1909/186 – Louise Barnes to Mr. Baring-Gould, 13 September 1909

²⁷ Huixing nǚzi zhongxue, ‘Ben xiao zhi lǚe shi’ in *Zhejiang Hangzhou shi sili Huixing nǚzi chuji zhongxue yilan* (Hangzhou, 1937).

in educational work in China, and had seen a great many schools, but never one quite like this – she quite envied me!’²⁸

The strict discipline of Missionary schools may have been another reason why elite reform-minded families such as Zeng’s chose to send their daughters to missionary establishments in this period. By the turn of the century, education was becoming a class indicator for girls, and Zeng’s was the first generation of her social class to receive a public education outside of the home. As Joan Judge has explored, the moral ambiguity of the female student, as the first category of ‘respectable’ women to step into the public sphere, was of deep concern in the print media discourse of the early twentieth century.²⁹ At Mary Vaughan, as in many missionary schools for girls in this period, conservative notions of female obedience and family loyalty were encouraged above all else, thus making it an attractive option for the upper classes, and allaying parental concerns that a public education would give girls radical ideas and unfit them for their traditional roles as ‘good wives and wise mothers.’ Indeed Barnes stressed that the aim of female education in China was ‘not only imparting intellectual knowledge, but of the training of these dear girls to be loyal, true and noble Chinese women.’³⁰

In her memoirs Zeng attributes her conversion to Christianity while studying at Mary Vaughan to three main factors: Firstly, the influence of Miss Barnes who forgave her after she led a short-lived rebellion against the school, sparked by the arrogance of a foreign teacher who, she felt, unfairly punished the whole class for one student’s misdemeanour. Secondly, she cites the example of another teacher, Miss Stuart who had returned to China as a missionary despite being crippled as a child and losing her parents during the Boxer

²⁸ CMS/G1/CH2 /O/1908/198 – Louise Barnes to Mr. Baring-Gould, 30 November, 1908.

²⁹ Joan Judge, *Republican Lens: Gender, Visuality and Experience in the Early Chinese Periodical Press*, (Berkeley, 2015), pp. 56 -57.

³⁰ CMS/G1/CH2 /O/1909/177 – Louise Barnes to Mr. Baring-Gould, 23 August 1909.

Uprising of 1900. Finally, she was moved by her experience of attending revival meetings held at Mary Vaughan by Pastor Ding Limei 丁立美, one of the most influential Chinese preachers of the early twentieth century.³¹

Becoming the first Christian in her family was a challenge, as Zeng explained in her memoir: ‘it was not easy to convert to Christianity at that time. In the first place my family had been followers of Confucianism for thousands of years None of our friends or relatives were followers of foreign religions. To have a young woman of the family become a Christian would simply make them a laughing-stock.’³² While her grandmother was opposed to her conversion, her father was not, and gave his permission, after asking Zeng to read several texts, including Thomas Huxley’s *On Evolution and Ethics*, and Charles Darwin’s *Origin of Species*, to ensure she was making an informed choice.³³

The conversion of the daughter of such a family was the fulfilment of a female missionary educator’s greatest hopes: to convert the upper classes to Christianity via their educated daughters. As her close relationship with Barnes developed and she continued to excel academically, Zeng accompanied Barnes back to England on her furlough in order to pursue a higher education, thus embarking on a new life course on the eve of the 1911 revolution. Her family allowed her to pursue higher education in the UK under one condition: that she remain under Barnes’ care at all times, and if Barnes returned to China, so must Zeng.³⁴

Higher education in the UK

Zeng’s educational experiences highlight the new networks for Chinese Christian women that were emerging on a local, national and international scale at the turn of the twentieth century.

³¹ Kennedy, *Confucian Feminist*, p. 29.

³² Kennedy, *Confucian Feminist*, p. 30.

³³ Kennedy, *Confucian Feminist*, p. 30.

³⁴ Kennedy, *Confucian Feminist*, p.35.

These networks provided women with unprecedented mobility and exposure to new experiences and life choices. Zeng, having already moved from Changsha to Shanghai to Zhejiang for her middle school education, now, under the protection of her teacher, Louise Barnes, studied in England. Zeng made use of these global missionary networks in seeking support to establish her own school for girls at Changsha.

Zeng studied at two girls' high schools in London, Worthing Church House School and Blackheath Girls School, before she passed the entrance examinations to Westfield College in September 1913.³⁵ She lived with Barnes, who rented small houses near to the schools, but also had the companionship of her cousin, Zeng Yuenong 曾約農, who was studying engineering at the University of London.³⁶ As Barnes devoted herself to Zeng's education, their relationship grew to resemble that of mother and daughter. As Jane Hunter has shown, it was not unusual for missionary women to adopt Chinese children, normally abandoned girls.³⁷ Zeng, from an elite family, was in no need of rescue or adoption; however, studying abroad in a foreign country, she was in need of a surrogate mother or mentor figure and Barnes filled this role (fig. 1).

In 1913, while Zeng was preparing to sit for the examination to enter Westfield College, Barnes had to make a life-changing decision: would she go back to China and continue her work as Principal of the Mary Vaughan High School or stay in England and support Zeng in her studies? After much reflection, and correspondence with the CMS, who refused to grant her an extension of her furlough, Barnes decided her duty lay with her Chinese pupil. She revealed in a letter dated 20 May 1913:

³⁵ Blackheath Girls' School, Blackheath, London, Register, 1912, no. 727.

³⁶ Zeng Baosun maintained a very close friendship with her cousin Zeng Yuenong throughout her life and neither of them marry. Zeng Yuenong was later instrumental in helping Baosun set up her school, Yifang, where he acted as dean. He became a renowned educationalist in Hunan. As a man he had access to important political and social networks in Changsha from which Zeng may have been excluded due to her sex. Kennedy, *Confucian Feminist*, p. 37.

³⁷ See Hunter, *The Gospel of Gentility*, pp. 192-194.

There are a few, who feel very strongly I am giving up the 'many for the one', and perhaps Miss Tseng might be strengthened if left alone; others ... feel equally strongly I ought to remain in England at least for a time, and help the one who is capable, willing and ready to be trained... There is a strong feeling we have been praying for such a one to come forward, and I can best help China and the work by remaining and that by so doing I am helping to prepare 'the One for the Many'. She will do more than twenty of me.³⁸

Barnes felt strongly that the time had come for a self-supporting Christian church, and that Zeng as a Chinese Christian, could, with a college degree, return to China and achieve far more than she, a foreign missionary, could ever hope to achieve.

In October 1913 Zeng entered Westfield College, one of the three all-female colleges affiliated with the University of London, majoring in Biology and minoring in Mathematics.³⁹ Taking its inspiration from Mt. Holyoke College in the USA, Westfield was founded in 1882 with the goal of promoting women's higher education with a distinctly Christian ethos, as reflected in its original motto: 'Behold the Handmaiden of the Lord.' Evangelism both at home and overseas remained at the heart of the college enterprise, with many of its graduates going on to work for the CMS.⁴⁰

Zeng's experience of the English education system exposed her to new ideas which she would carry back to China and apply to her own school for girls in Changsha. Zeng provides a pertinent example of Chinese women's agency in the transnational circulation of educational ideas between China and the West in the early twentieth century. In her memoirs she states frankly: 'Life at Westfield College, was filled with new experiences for me. The exposure to the way that students were treated at Westfield and the way they responded and

³⁸ CMS/G1/CH2 /O/1913/121 – Louise Barnes to Mr Bardsley, 20 May 1913

³⁹ Queen Mary University Archives (QMA) now holds the Westfield College papers – WFD-10-1-3-Register, 102.

⁴⁰ Janet Sondheimer, *Castle Adamant in Hampstead: A history of Westfield College 1882–1982*, (London, 1983), p. 7.

conducted themselves afforded me important insights that influenced my direction of women's education in China.'⁴¹ Zeng explained how the English trimester system would need to be adapted in China: 'This system of trimesters in the academic year would not work too well in China but the longer summer vacation would be an excellent idea to allow students to be out of classes during the extreme heat and have more time for review. It would also be suitable for schools in tropical Asia.'⁴² She was also impressed by the trust and power afforded to the autonomous Student Association, which was self-governing and represented the interests of students to the college, and by the trust placed in students during examinations for which there was no proctor: 'I became familiar with a fine educational system. Later when I headed the Yifang School, I adopted many of the methods used at Westfield. Naturally, middle school students could not be given as much freedom as university students, but Yifang did not proctor examinations. It did not register de-merits; nor did we dismiss students for a certain number of demerits. These ideas I absorbed during my years at Westfield.'⁴³ Zeng's experience thus complicates the picture of a one-way flow of educational knowledge between China and the West. Rather, Zeng's experience shows that Chinese women were active agents in the dynamic flow of educational knowledge and expertise between China and the West, taking the best of two complementary systems and adapting it to a specific cultural setting, much as Chinese Christians were able to take and absorb aspects of Christianity as they saw fit, adapting it to Chinese culture.

During the First World War, Zeng was also deeply influenced by Quaker pacifism and by the social gospel which was becoming popular in missionary circles in the first decades of the twentieth century. She joined the Westfield College branch of the Student Volunteer Movement (SVM), joining in small group discussions about religious and social problems.

⁴¹ Kennedy, *Confucian Feminist*, p. 52.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 54.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

During this period of spiritual and intellectual growth, Zeng applied her Christian faith to the national situation in China, deciding that the best way for her to serve her country was to found her own Chinese-run Christian school for girls, and she started to use her own extensive network in the UK to realise this dream.⁴⁴

The Yifang School for girls at Changsha

The Yifang Collegiate School for Girls 藝芳女子學院 was established by Zeng Baosun and her cousin Zeng Yuenong in Changsha in 1918. In Zeng's efforts to found her own school for girls, we must look beyond the self-congratulatory rhetoric of the missionary enterprise in praising her as the fruit of their labour, to examine how Zeng actively and resourcefully utilized the networks and connections which her Christian education opened to her, as well as her family's resources, and how she skilfully incorporated the best aspects of her international educational experiences into her own school for girls.

In spring 1915, during her third year of study at Westfield College, Zeng began to formulate her plans for her school. Although Barnes had originally conceived that Zeng would return to work as a teacher at the Mary Vaughan High School in Hangzhou, Zeng was not convinced of these plans for several reasons. Zhejiang province, situated on the East coast of China, already had a number of schools for girls. She felt she could serve her country better by starting her own school for girls in the capital of her home province, Changsha, Hunan, where there were far fewer educational options available to girls of her class. In 1917 there was only one missionary middle school offering senior middle school training to girls (jointly run by American Presbyterian and United Evangelical Church) and no higher level government middle schools which could prepare girls for university.⁴⁵ The possibility of using the

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

⁴⁵ *Educational Directory of China* (Shanghai, 1917), p. 19.

resources and connections of the Zeng family to start her school was also an important consideration in Zeng's decision to return to Changsha.⁴⁶

Using her own name and social position as a drawing point, Zeng's school was aimed at girls from elite families, who had previously been left out of the missionary school system. She aspired that her school might grow into a Central China Women's College, with a connection to a foreign university, along the lines of Ginling College in Nanjing.⁴⁷ By 1926 her curriculum offered a six-year middle school course, and four years of college level education for girls which aimed at achieving university standard.⁴⁸ Enrolment grew steadily from eight pupils in 1918, to more than sixty by 1927, and the school expanded its buildings and facilities to meet this growing demand.⁴⁹

A second important aspect of Zeng's decision was her conviction of the pressing need to indigenise the church in China. After the 1911 Revolution, with the rise of Chinese nationalism, many missionaries (including Barnes) recognised the pressing need for a Chinese-controlled church. Zeng was also inspired by her Uncle Zeng Jirong, who had set up his own Chinese Christian church in Changsha as she recalls in her memoir⁵⁰:

I wanted to start a Christian School run entirely by Chinese. Not that mission schools were not good but I felt that Christianity must be completely assimilated in Chinese society before the Chinese people would embrace it as their own religion, as they did Buddhism. Uncle Jirong had also felt this way and started an independent Christian Church in Changsha. I would be very willing to accept

⁴⁶ Kennedy, *Confucian Feminist*, p. 57.

⁴⁷ QMA-WDF-15-3-2, Circulars relating to I-Fang, 'A New School for China', c. 1916.

⁴⁸ QMA-WDF-15-3-2, Winifred Galbraith, March 1926.

⁴⁹ Winifred Galbraith, 'An Experiment in Chinese Education', *The Chinese Recorder*, (July, 1927), p. 427.

⁵⁰ Zeng Jirong had been helped by Christian missionaries to recover from his addiction to opium and converted to Christianity at the same time as Zeng Baosun in December 1911. Kennedy, *Confucian Feminist*, p. 30.

foreign personnel and financial help, but unwilling to accept foreign control or foreign imposed conditions. Ms. Barnes agreed with this idea.⁵¹

Unlike some of her fellow CMS missionaries, Barnes herself had long been supportive of the principle of a Chinese-led Christian Church.⁵² Yifang thus became a remarkable early example of a Chinese-established Christian School in China. Another remarkable aspect of the school, for its time, was the reversal of the power dynamics between missionary school pupil and teacher, as Zeng became headmistress of the school with Barnes as an English teacher under her (fig. 2). As Zeng recalls in her memoir, this was almost unheard of at the time in China: ‘Ms. Barnes agreed to teach English but preferred that I serve as principal. I think this may have been a first in those days in China: an elderly foreigner working under a young Chinese, especially a Chinese who had formerly been her student.’⁵³ We can question to what extent was this reversal of the power relationship between western missionary and Chinese student as dramatic as Zeng presents. The differences in both class background and financial resources may have made this power shift more natural. Barnes, conscious of her lowly class and educational background was both proud and in awe of her upper-class Chinese pupil. Zeng hints in her memoirs that she was aware of Barnes’ very ‘ordinary’ background: ‘I discovered that she was not extremely learned and articulate, simply an ordinary person.’⁵⁴ It is also possible that Barnes became financially dependent on Zeng after resigning from the CMS. The financial support that Barnes received from the wealthy family of Mary Vaughan and lived on for the rest of her life was partly due to their friendship, and partly due to the prestigious Chinese student she had under her charge.⁵⁵

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

⁵² CMS/G1/CH2 /O/1913/121 – Louise Barnes to CMS Committee, 30 November 1913

⁵³ Kennedy, *Confucian Feminist*, p. 76.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

⁵⁵ According to Zeng the family of Mary Vaughan gave Barnes £8000 to use at her discretion shortly after her resignation from the CMS. Kennedy, *Confucian Feminist*, p.48. This was a huge sum. According to Barnes’s will she had almost £2000 left upon her death in 1928. Principal Probate Registry. Calendar of the Grants of

In establishing her school, Zeng drew upon the networks, local, national and international to which both her Christian educational background and status as a member of the Zeng family gave her access. The principals of Westfield College, Agnes de Sélincourt and later, Helen Richardson were supportive of Zeng's idea for a Girls' School in Changsha and were instrumental in gaining donations to raise the funds needed. After the school was established Helen Richardson helped secure the appointment of three foreign teachers for Yifang: Miss Madge (1922-1924), Miss Winifred A. Galbraith (1925-1927), and Violet C. Grubb (1925-1927) were all 'Old Westfieldians' with degrees and educational experience.⁵⁶ In 1922 the school was by no means self-supporting, mostly funded by Zeng family donations, and therefore it was imperative to secure donations to support the cost of these foreign workers. Zeng Baosun, Zeng Yuenong and Barnes did not receive salaries.⁵⁷

Lists of foreign and Chinese sponsors of the school also reveal the importance of the personal contacts that Zeng made during her studies in the UK, in helping her secure the necessary funds.⁵⁸ Using her CMS contacts, Barnes introduced Zeng to several prominent missionary families, Christian educators and churchmen, including the wealthy family of Mary Vaughan.⁵⁹ Zeng also recalls the invaluable help provided by Miss Sélincourt: 'She sought out a number of prominent and zealous Englishmen who would give their support. Amongst them was Dr. W. Temple, later Archbishop of England. She also enlisted Ms. Richardson and Ms. McDougall to help me present my ideas to other educators. She considered this true missionary work.'⁶⁰ Zeng also made important contacts during her further studies in education at St. Hugh's College, Oxford, and Newnham College, Cambridge during the

Probate and Letters of Administration made in the Probate Registries of the High Court of Justice in England. London, England, 1928, p. 172.

⁵⁶ Kennedy, *Confucian Feminist*, p. 58.

⁵⁷ QMA-WDF-15-3-2, Pao Swen Tseng, Circular letter, 3 March 1922

⁵⁸ QMA-WDF-15-3-2, Circulars relating to I-Fang, 'List of donors 1917-1925'.

⁵⁹ QMA-WDF-15-3-2, Circulars relating to I-Fang, 'List of donors 1917-1925'.

⁶⁰ Kennedy, *Confucian Feminist*, p. 57.

summers of 1916 and 1917.⁶¹ On her way back to China in autumn 1917, Zeng travelled via the USA and Canada where she advertised her new school, making valuable contact with leading Chinese intellectuals, including Hu Shi 胡適 and Chen Hengzhe 陳衡哲.⁶²

Zeng's social position, as a descendant of the famous Zeng Guofan, no doubt facilitated her access to these contacts and social networks. Moreover, upon her return to Changsha, the Zeng family used its influence to secure the recovery of the Zeng Guofan Ancestral Temple as a site for the school, and ensure its smooth registration with the Hunan provincial education authorities.⁶³ With the backing of her family proving a powerful asset (at least in its early days), the school was officially opened on 12 September 1918 with eight pupils. The school was named Yifang 藝芳, in memory of Zeng's grandmother's studio at Prosperity Hall.⁶⁴

In establishing her school for girls in Changsha, Zeng aimed to take the best of her Chinese and western educational experiences, and combine them into a unique formulation. She was aware of the advantages and pitfalls of each system and hoped to bridge the gap between Chinese government and foreign missionary education: 'The gulf separating Church-sponsored and secular education at that time was great... The two educational systems, church and secular, rivalled each other but each had its forte. The church-operated universities inevitably stressed English, Western History and Geography, and Science. Although they made a considerable contribution in introducing new knowledge, they also missed a great deal concerning Chinese history, customs and the traditional culture.'⁶⁵

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 70.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

⁶⁴ QMA-WDF-15-3-5, Pao Swen Tseng to Dr. Thwaites, 13 December 1971.

⁶⁵ Kennedy, *Confucian Feminist*, p. 71.

Zeng aimed to bridge this gap, drawing from both Chinese and English schools to fulfil what she perceived to be the needs of Chinese girls at Changsha. Her curriculum offered courses in the Chinese Classics and history, geography, mathematics and science. Advanced mathematics courses included algebra, trigonometry, calculus, and geometry.⁶⁶ Students also benefited from the tuition of English by native speakers who taught texts ranging from Charles Kingsley's *Heroes* to Shakespeare. Zeng's curriculum was designed to outstrip both the Chinese government and western missionary school curricula for girls at the middle school level.⁶⁷ Zeng reported proudly in 1948 the high college entrance rates of Yifang students: 'Our students have been uniformly successful in college entrance examinations: ninety per cent of our old students have university degrees. More than half of our students are in actual work outside the home.'⁶⁸

Her educational plan had several distinguishing features, which made it both different from and similar to missionary schools in China. Perhaps recalling her own frustration at the strict, atmosphere at missionary schools, Zeng was keen to stress student self-government and leadership in her school. A School Union was formed and all important decisions concerning the school were voted on by the students. Based on her experience of the student democracy and debating society at Westfield, Zeng also encouraged the students to practise debating issues of national concern. Sometimes she and Zeng Yunong, would take opposite stances in the debate as an example for the students. Winifred Galbraith recalled:

From the first the school has been self-governing; staff and students all belong to the students' union which settles all business of the school. ... These meetings and decisions provide

⁶⁶ QMA-WDF-15-3-2, Pao Swen Tseng, Circular letter, August 1921.

⁶⁷ QMA-WDF-15-3-2, Pao Swen Tseng, Circular letter, August 1921.

⁶⁸ QMA-WDF-15-3-5, Pao Swen Tseng to Principal of Westfield College, 5 April, 1948.

valuable training in public speaking, good temper, and for the foreigner at least, patience, since neither lessons, meals nor bedtimes are allowed to cut short the discussion.⁶⁹

Several important and influential speakers came to Yifang in the period 1918-1927, including the President of Peking University Cai Yuanpei 蔡元培, who lectured on the ‘Importance of Women’s Education’, and the former Premier of China, Xiong Xiling 熊希齡, who spoke on ‘Women’s Work’, as well as several YWCA secretaries and members of the Yale in China Mission.⁷⁰ This was policy, as Zeng explained in her memoir: ‘We also invited several well-known people to deliver lectures. Later, we established a regular practice of having someone from outside of the school speak on a specialized topic every Friday afternoon. On Saturday, I always had a one-hour talk on current events: world affairs or problems related to China, Hunan province or society at large.’⁷¹

In its religious aspects Yifang differed from missionary schools in several ways. Although there were daily morning prayers and hymns led by Zeng, Sunday worship and bible study classes, Yifang was not officially affiliated to any mission or denomination. Nor did Yifang require its students to attend chapel or bible study, which until 1927 was usually compulsory at missionary schools. Indeed, Zeng was keen for girls to make informed decisions about their spiritual life, and invited members of every missionary society in Changsha to come to the school and give talks to the girls on Sundays. In her circular letter of 1922 Louise Barnes describes the open-minded interdenominational religious atmosphere at Yifang:

Miss Tseng is one of those who look forward to the development of the native Christian church and she does not therefore ally herself to any missionary body, though living in sympathetic relationship with the various Christian communities

⁷⁰ QMA-WDF-15-3-2, Pao Swen Tseng, Circular letter, August 1921.

⁷¹ Kennedy, *Confucian Feminist*, p. 76.

represented in Changsha, a member from each of which is asked to give an address in the school each Sunday. No pressure is put upon girls to become baptised, but when they do wish fully to accept the Christian faith, they are left entirely free to choose which Christian church they wish to belong.⁷²

In providing such an ecumenical atmosphere, Yifang was ahead of its time, foreshadowing the formation of the National Christian Council of China (*Zhonghua quanguo jidujiao xiejinhui* 中華全國基督教協進會), founded in 1922, which sought to transcend denominational divides by establishing a Chinese-controlled church. Zeng's example as headmistress exerted a powerful influence, and many girls who came from elite non-Christian families became Christian through the exposures to the Christian atmosphere that pervaded Yifang.

There is not scope within this article to tell the story of Yifang itself, and the turbulent experience of its pupils, Chinese and foreign teachers during the May Fourth Movement, the upheavals of the Northern Expedition in 1926-27, and the war with Japan which led to the destruction and re-founding of the school three times between 1918 and 1949. Barnes died on 13 September 1927 in Shanghai of a heart attack, which Zeng believed to be triggered by the strain of their escape from Changsha during the Northern Expedition.⁷³ During the 1930s Zeng was a YWCA delegate giving lecture tours across China, and represented China at the meeting of the World Christian Council in Madras in 1938, before she was elected to the National Assembly in 1948. In 1949 Zeng fled to Hong Kong and was then invited by the Nationalist Government to reside on Taiwan, where she died in 1978. The legacy of Zeng's work at Yifang is manifested in the generations of Chinese women whom she helped to educate. The strong Yifang alumna association proudly carries on its school history in its

⁷² QMA-WDF-15-3-2, Louise Barnes, 'An Outstanding Educational Enterprise', 1922.

⁷³ Kennedy, *Confucian Feminist*, p. 93.

annual meetings and quarterly magazine.⁷⁴ On the today's Yifang Campus (Changsha Tianjiabing Experimental Middle School, 长沙市田家炳实验中学), there is a monument celebrating the important contributions of Zeng Baosun, Zeng Guofan and Zeng Yuenong to modern Chinese education.

Zeng's life story, although an extraordinary one, highlights the dynamic role played by Chinese Christian women in the transfer of educational knowledge between China and the West in the early twentieth century. Their status as Christian was essential in this process: Chinese women could use the Christian networks to which their education and social status gave them access for their own ends. Rather than being the 'passive recipients' or 'fruits' of missionary labour, Chinese women were active agents in this exchange, appropriating, combining and rejecting different aspects of their educational experience as they saw fit. In Zeng's case, the result was a novel form of education that aimed to combine the best of the missionary, British and Chinese educational systems to hone the next generation of Chinese women. In Zeng's changing relationship with Barnes, from pupil and teacher, to headmistress and friend, we can see the changing power balance between missionaries and Chinese Christians in the early twentieth century. The school they established in mutual co-operation is an early example of the indigenization of the Chinese church, which in the 1920s and 1930s would become such a pressing issue in the face of the rising tide of Chinese nationalism.

⁷⁴Changsha Tianjiabing Shiyang zhongxue, *Yifang Wanjiang*, (Changsha, 2006).